

Talking to Teens about Marijuana

It has never been easy to talk to teens about the dangers of smoking marijuana, but it has become increasingly challenging in light of legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington as well as the pervasive legalization of medical marijuana. Teens often hear what they want to hear, but like everything it is important to make sure that they understand the risks of the smoking marijuana.

In addition to having an ongoing dialogue about the pressures and stress that your teen may be feeling, how they may be feeling peer pressure to smoke pot, or how smoking pot makes them feel, parents need to share the real scientific data about how THC (the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana) affects adolescents' developing brains. THC moves through the bloodstream quickly, from the lungs to the brain, causing an immediate "high," but it is a neurotoxin that can permanently alter the brain's structure and function. Daily marijuana smoking affects the brain's working memory, which is critical to learning and recall.

Smoking marijuana can be addictive, and the damage to lungs by the deep inhalation of the smoke is greater than that of cigarette smoke.

Taking a step back, the human brain continues to develop well into the 20s. Because of this, teens' brains are especially vulnerable to the effects of THC, which can disrupt the development of neural pathways, especially in teens who are chronic marijuana users. While there is conflicting evidence regarding the long-term neurocognitive effects of smoking marijuana, there is no question that the teen years are a very vulnerable time to terms of brain development.

There is also research which links early marijuana use with the development of serious mental health disorders, including addiction, serious depression and anxiety and other disorders. It can lead to a syndrome that gets in the way of learning and schoolwork. Teens need to understand how smoking marijuana will reduce their options in life, may lead to addiction and is likely to contribute to lower achievement than they would achieve otherwise.

So what can parents do? They need to present the facts about smoking marijuana. At the same time, parents need to be able to take their teen's pulse and carry on a dialogue that isn't primarily about the dangers of smoking marijuana, but is about the pressures and concerns that your teen is feeling. This conversation is about trying to understand each other, so that all members of the family can be supportive of each other. Talking about serious issues like the risks of marijuana use and drug addiction is one facet of how a parent expresses concern, support and love. While your teen may not thank you for this, it will help create a space for him/her where s/he can mature and grow and learn how to make wise choices.

Further Reading

Tips for Listening Without Judgment

[Smoking Weed Could Cost Teens](#)

[Free Marijuana Talk Kit from the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#)

[How to Listen to Your Teen](#)

[What's So Bad About Teen Marijuana Use? Some Surprising Answers](#)

[Drug Use Prevention for Parents of Student Athletes](#)